

Original Research

## Effect of tachykinins on ascending and descending reflex pathway in rat small intestine<sup>1</sup>

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**KEY WORDS** tachykinins; neurokinin-1 receptors; neurokinin-2 receptors; substance P

### ABSTRACT

**AIM:** To examine the effect of tachykinins on the ascending reflex pathway in rat small intestine, we used different selective neurokinin (NK) receptor antagonists (RA): a) NK<sub>1</sub>-RA: GR-82334 and CP-96.345, b) NK<sub>2</sub>-RA: MEN-10.376 and L-659.877. The aim was further to investigate the effect of substance P (SP) on the ascending excitatory and descending inhibitory reflex pathway. **METHODS:** The whole segments of rat ileum (10 cm in length) were studied in an organ bath. Ascending contraction of circle muscle was elicited by anal electrical stimulation (3 Hz, 1 ms, 20 V) and measured as change of intraluminal pressure by a perfused manometric system 2 cm and 4 cm orad of the stimulation site. **RESULTS:** GR-82334 and CP-96.345 (NK<sub>1</sub>-RA) caused a significant dose-related inhibition of the oral contraction at a distance of 4 cm: GR-82334 [area: -10 % ± 8 % (10 nmol/L); -29 % ± 10 % (1000 nmol/L).  $P < 0.05$ ,  $n = 10$ ], CP-96.345 [area: -2 % ± 6 % (0.1 nmol/L); -14 % ± 10 % (10 nmol/L).  $P < 0.01$ ,  $n = 8$ ], whereas the contractile response at a distance of 2 cm was unaltered ( $n = 8$ ). In contrast, MEN-10.376 and L-659.877 (NK<sub>2</sub>-RA) did not alter the amplitude or the area under the curve ( $n = 10$ ). Neither the NK<sub>1</sub>- nor the NK<sub>2</sub>-receptor antagonists had a significant effect on the latency of the reflex

response. SP showed a significant increase in the ascending contraction and the descending relaxation ( $n = 6$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ). **CONCLUSION:** These results demonstrate that blockade of NK<sub>1</sub>-receptors decreases the oral reflex response. Latency of the reflex response remains unchanged, indicating that the effect is not due to an action on interneurons. NK<sub>2</sub>-receptors do not take part in the ascending reflex in rat small intestine. SP increases the descending relaxant reflex response and ascending contraction.

### INTRODUCTION

Tachykinins like substance P (SP) and neurokinin A (NKA) are present in and released from enteric neurons. NK<sub>1</sub>-receptors have been located on neurons and interstitial cells of Cajal (ICC) in rat intestine and NK<sub>2</sub>-receptors are located on muscle cells. Neurokinins, as part of the tachykinin family, are a group of five known peptides with the same C-terminal amino acid sequence (Phe-X-Gly-Leu-Met-NH<sub>2</sub>) isolated from mammalian tissue<sup>[1]</sup>. They are named substance P (SP), neurokinin A (NKA), and neurokinin B (NKB) as well as neuropeptide K (NPK) and neuropeptide  $\gamma$  (NP $\gamma$ ), two extended forms of NKA. They are derived from the preprotachykinin A (SP, NKA, NPK, NP $\gamma$ ) and preprotachykinin B (NKB) gene<sup>[2-5]</sup>. Some of them (SP, NKA, NP $\gamma$ ) could be localized in and released from enteric neurons as neurotransmitters<sup>[6-8]</sup>. Today it is commonly accepted that tachykinins are a group of major excitatory transmitters in the intestine of motoneurons, interneurons, and afferent nerve fibers<sup>[6]</sup>. Some of them are co-localized (SP and NKA)<sup>[9]</sup>. Three distinct tachykinin receptors are named NK<sub>1</sub>-, NK<sub>2</sub>-, and NK<sub>3</sub>-receptors. Further NK<sub>2</sub>-receptor subtypes were postulated and classified into NK<sub>2A</sub>- and NK<sub>2B</sub>-receptor subtypes<sup>[10-13]</sup>. Neurokinin receptors were localized in

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smooth muscle cells in the intestine ( $NK_2$ -receptors)<sup>[14-17]</sup> and in neurons of the enteric nervous system ( $NK_1$ -receptors<sup>[12,18,19]</sup> and  $NK_3$ -receptors<sup>[18,20]</sup>). Recently  $NK_1$  receptors were shown to be on interstitial cells of Cajal<sup>[12]</sup>. SP, NKA, and NKB preferentially bind at  $NK_1$ -,  $NK_2$ -, and  $NK_3$ -receptors, respectively<sup>[12,15]</sup>. But they are unselective and bind to all receptors with increasing concentration<sup>[15,21]</sup>. A number of different potent and selective  $NK_1$ - and  $NK_2$ -tachykinin receptor antagonists have been developed during the last few years<sup>[10,22]</sup>. GR-82334 and CP-96.345 are two  $NK_1$ -receptor antagonists, MEN-10.376 and L-659.877 are specific ligands to  $NK_2$ -receptors. In contrast there is a lack of specific  $NK_3$ -receptor antagonists. The proposed  $NK_3$ -receptor antagonist SR-14298 seems to exhibit its selective effects only in the guinea pig but have no discriminating activity in the rat (oral correspondence). A new receptor antagonist to  $NK_3$ -receptors in rat intestine is not available yet. Tachykinins show a potent effect on peristalsis in the small intestine, but less data is available on reflex pathway<sup>[14,15,17,23]</sup>. Therefore this study was performed to examine (1) the effects of different specific tachykinin  $NK_1$ - and  $NK_2$ -receptor antagonists; (2) the neurons involved; (3) the effect of substance P on the ascending and descending reflex response in rat small intestine.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Experimental protocol** Wistar male rats (300–400 g, Grade II, Charles-River, Munich, Germany) were sacrificed using sodium pentobarbital intraperitoneally (80 mg/kg). The ileum was immediately removed and kept in oxygenated Krebs-Ringer buffer (KRB). An *in vitro* reflex model, a modification of the classical Trendelenburg preparation<sup>[24]</sup>, was used to record ascending and descending reflex activity<sup>[25,26]</sup>. The whole segments of ileum (10 cm in length) were carefully dissected, and the mesenteric arcade was removed. The gut segments were placed in a 35 mL organ-bath filled with KRB, gassed with carbogen (95%  $O_2$ , 5%  $CO_2$ ), and maintained at 37 °C by a thermostatic-water-bath. The oral and caudal end of the ileum were tied onto a polyvinyl tubing (outer diameter 4 mm) in such a way that the segment maintained its natural length. Intraluminal pressure, representative for circular muscle activity, was recorded by a perfused manometric system (Mui Scientific, Mississauga,

Canada) measuring at 2 cm and 4 cm oral of the stimulation site<sup>[25]</sup>. Further force transducers (Grass, Quincy, MA, USA) were used to measure the effect of SP on the descending relaxation. Two of them were fixed 2 cm oral and 2 cm caudal from the stimulation site as described previously<sup>[26]</sup>. Two flat platinum electrodes (0.5 cm × 1.0 cm) were placed aborally (manometric system) and in-between (transducer system) the two recording sites, respectively. Then the preparation was allowed to equilibrate for at least 30 min. Contractile changes as well as latency between stimulation and contraction were measured and recorded using a Sensormedics R611 chart recorder (Sensormedics, Anaheim, CA, USA). Field stimulation impulses for neural responses were applied using a Grass S11 stimulator (Grass, Quincy, MA, USA), stimulating for 15 s at intervals of 2 min at standard parameters of 20 V pulse strength, 3 Hz pulse frequency, 2 ms pulse width. The stimulus signals were recorded simultaneously with the motility recording on the chart recorder using an A/C coupler (Beckman, Berlin, Germany). In the manometric system (Sigma scan, Jandel Scientific, USA) the oral contraction, the amplitude, the area under the curve, and the time of latency was recorded. In the system using the force transducers, the ascending contraction, the descending contractile response, and the descending relaxation were recorded by means of area under the curve.

**Experimental design** The gut segment was stimulated every 2 min, and periodic stimulation was maintained throughout the experiment. After an equilibration period of 30 min, a stable response to the electrical stimulation was established (identical contractions to at least 3 consecutive stimuli). Drugs were added 60 s after the last stimulation and before the next electrical stimulation. The substances were added to the bath in 35  $\mu$ L volumes. For each concentration at least three reflex responses were elicited before the next concentration was applied. Appropriate control experiments were performed with vehicles to exclude unspecific effects. At the end of the experimental protocol, the buffer (KRB) was exchanged several times, and after a period of 15 min a control recording was performed.

**Drugs** Hexamethonium (HM), tetrodotoxin (TTX), and substance P (SP) were from Sigma (Irvine, UK); MEN-10.376, L-659.877, and GR-82334 from Research Biochemical International (RBI, Koln, Germany); CP-96.345 from Pfitzer GmbH (Karlsruhe,

Germany).

Krebs-Ringer buffer; Na<sup>+</sup> 138.68 mmol/L; Cl<sup>-</sup> 122.61 mmol/L; HCO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> 22.14 mmol/L; glucose 11.11 mmol/L; K<sup>+</sup> 4.60 mmol/L; Mg<sup>2+</sup> 1.25 mmol/L; Ca<sup>2+</sup> 2.63 mmol/L; SO<sub>4</sub><sup>2-</sup> 1.25 mmol/L; H<sub>2</sub>PO<sub>4</sub><sup>-</sup> 1.16 mmol/L.

The drugs were dissolved in purified distilled water, stored at -20 °C, and freshly resolved immediately before use and further diluted in KRB. The drugs were added in portions of 35 μL.

**Statistics** Data are expressed as  $\bar{x} \pm s$  and *n* indicates the number of independent observations in different segments of small intestine. ANOVA analysis of variance with repeated measures and Bonferroni correction for multiple comparison were used to compare the mean values, and *P* < 0.05 was considered to be significant.

## RESULTS

### Characterization of the experimental system

All motility responses caused by electrical field stimulation were abolished by tetrodotoxin (TTX) (300 nmol/L; oral contraction: -96 % ± 4 %; caudal relaxation: -94 % ± 4 %; caudal contractile response: -100 % ± 0 %; *n* = 5) as well as hexamethonium (0.1 mmol/L; oral contraction: -100 % ± 0 %; caudal relaxation: -90 % ± 5 %; caudal contractile response: -100 % ± 0 %; *n* = 5) demonstrating a neuronal and ganglionic transmission, which was consistent with the results reported previously<sup>[25]</sup>.

**Effects on NK<sub>1</sub>-receptors** GR-82334, a blocker of the NK<sub>1</sub>-receptor, caused a significant inhibition of the amplitude (*P* < 0.05, *n* = 10), the oral contraction and the area under the curve at a distance of 4 cm (Fig 1, Tab 1), whereas the response was not changed at a distance of 2 cm (Tab 1). The latency between onset of the stimulation and beginning of the contraction was unaltered at 2 cm and 4 cm (data for 4 cm; Fig 1, Tab 1) distance from the stimulation site.

CP-96.345, another NK<sub>1</sub>-receptor antagonist, also caused a significant inhibition (*P* < 0.05, *n* = 8), the area under the curve of the oral contraction at a distance of 4 cm (Fig 2, Tab 1), but was not altered at 2 cm distance. The amplitude and the latency were unaltered at 2 cm and 4 cm (data for 4 cm; Tab 1).

**Effects on the ascending excitatory reflex pathway** Using the force transducer system we

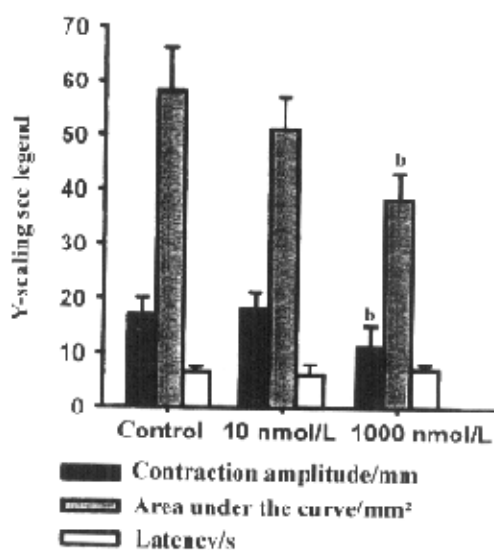


Fig 1. GR-82334 (10 nmol/L, 1000 nmol/L) reduced significantly the amplitude and the area under the curve of the ascending contraction at a distance of 4 cm. Latency between electrical field stimulation and contraction response was unaffected in rat small intestine. *n* = 10.  $\bar{x} \pm s$ . \**P* < 0.05 vs control.

Tab 1. The effect of different neurokinin receptor antagonists on the oral contraction, area under the curve, and latency between onset of stimulation and begin of contraction.  $\bar{x} \pm s$ .

Group	Dose/ mmol·L <sup>-1</sup>	<i>n</i>	Amplitude/ %	Area under the curve/ %	Latency/ %
GR-82334	10	10	6 ± 12	-10 ± 8	0 ± 20
	1000	10	-26 ± 10	-29 ± 10	28 ± 19
CP-96.345	0.1	8	4 ± 11	-2 ± 6	50 ± 33
	10	8	-2 ± 14	-14 ± 10	-33 ± 27
MEN-10.376	10	10	34 ± 23	12 ± 12	38 ± 37
	100	10	37 ± 29	14 ± 18	35 ± 38
	1000	10	-1 ± 16	4 ± 26	37 ± 37
L-659.877	10	10	-4 ± 7	0 ± 11	15 ± 21
	1000	10	4 ± 8	-6 ± 10	75 ± 35

investigated the effect of SP, a physiological agonist, which acts preferentially on NK<sub>1</sub>-receptors, applied in a concentration of 30 nmol/L and 300 nmol/L. SP caused a significant increase of the ascending contraction (30 nmol/L; +98 % ± 14 %; 300 nmol/L; +182 % ± 11 %; *n* = 6, *P* < 0.01) and the descending contractile response (30 nmol/L; +94 % ± 20 %; 300 nmol/L; +255 % ± 56 %; *n* = 7, *P* < 0.01) (Fig 3, 4). Further an induction of spontaneous contractions and later an increase of the tone occurred, but these responses were

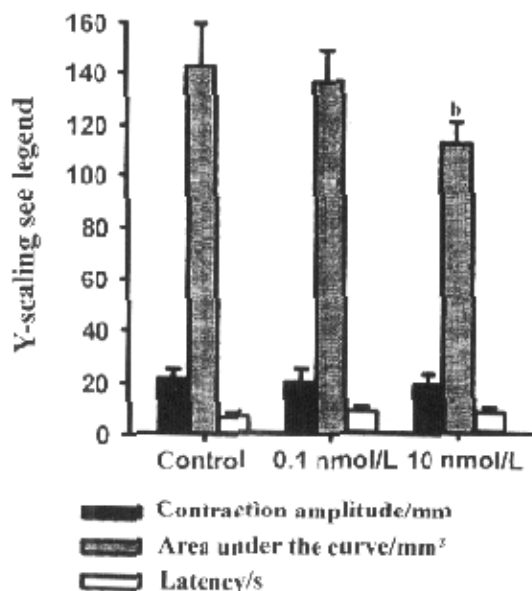


Fig 2. CP-96.345 (0.1 nmol/L, 10 nmol/L) reduced significantly the area under the curve of the ascending contraction at a distance of 4 cm. The amplitude of the contraction, as well as the latency between electrical field stimulation and contraction response of reflex pathway were not altered significantly in rat small intestine.  $n = 8$ .  $\bar{x} \pm s$ .  $^b P < 0.05$  vs control.

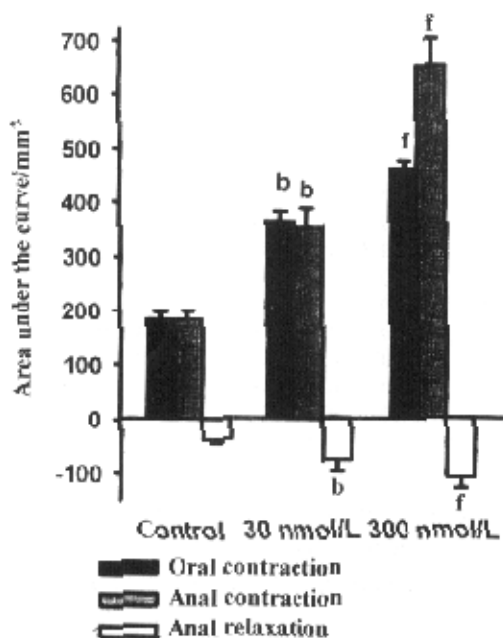


Fig 3. Substance P (30 nmol/L, 300 nmol/L) caused a significant increase of the ascending oral contraction, the descending caudal contractile response and the descending relaxation given as area under the curve in rat small intestine.  $n = 7$ .  $\bar{x} \pm s$ .  $^b P < 0.05$  vs 300 nmol/L.  $^f P < 0.01$  vs control.

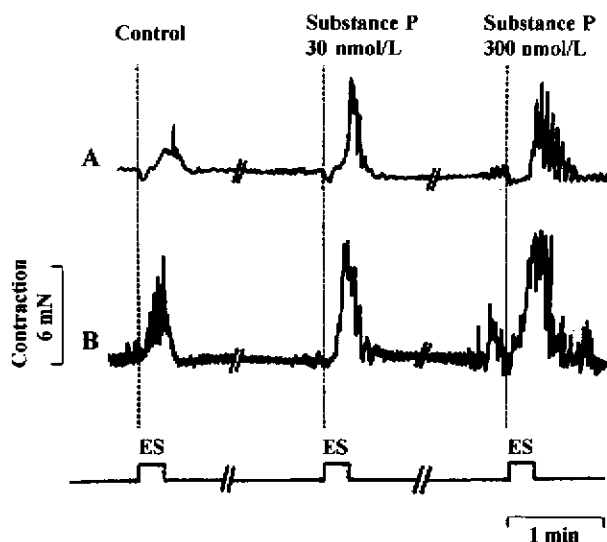


Fig 4. Representative trace of the increasing effect of substance P (30 nmol/L, 300 nmol/L) on the descending (A) contractile and ascending (B) contraction and relaxant reflex response in rat small intestine. ES; electrical field stimulation.

irregular and could therefore not be investigated systematically. They were not clear dose-dependent, but showed a trend towards higher concentrations (300 nmol/L). All effects were reversed completely after wash-out, what excluded a damage of the gut segment.

**Effect on NK<sub>2</sub>-receptors** In contrast to the results from NK<sub>1</sub>-receptor antagonists, MEN-10.376 (10 nmol/L, 100 nmol/L, 1000 nmol/L), a slightly specific NK<sub>2A</sub>-receptor antagonist, did not alter the amplitude or the area under the curve ( $n = 10$ ), neither at a distance of 4 cm (Tab 1) nor at a distance of 2 cm (data not shown). The latency was not changed by MEN-10.376 (Tab 1).

Similar results on the ascending reflex response in rat intestine were demonstrated by L-659.877, a specific NK<sub>2B</sub>-receptor antagonist, at a dose of 10 nmol/L and 1000 nmol/L; contraction amplitude, area under the curve of the contraction, and latency were not altered, neither at a distance of 4 cm ( $n = 10$ , Tab 1) nor at 2 cm distance (data not shown).

**Effect on the descending inhibitory reflex pathway** Substance P used in a concentration of 30 nmol/L and 300 nmol/L caused a significant increase of the descending relaxation (30 nmol/L: +117 %  $\pm$  30 %; 300 nmol/L: +248 %  $\pm$  52 %;  $n = 8$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ) as shown by the original tracing in Fig 4 and the diagram in Fig 3.

## DISCUSSION

Neurokinin receptors were shown by immunohistochemistry on neurons and interstitial cells of Cajal in rat intestine<sup>(18)</sup>. These results were confirmed by Western blot techniques<sup>(20)</sup>. NK<sub>1</sub>-receptor stained neurons have recently been postulated to be interneurons, as most neurons did not leave the myenteric plexus. Some stained NK<sub>1</sub>- and NK<sub>2</sub>-neurons have the morphology of dogiel type II neurons. Therefore these neurons were postulated to be sensory neurons. As demonstrated in our experimental system, SP, a known physiological excitatory neurotransmitter of motoneurons, interneurons and sensory neurons in the enteric nervous system, caused a significant increase of evoked contractions in reflex pathway in rat intestine at a concentration of 30 nmol/L and 300 nmol/L. SP is preferred but not highly specific to NK<sub>1</sub>-receptors<sup>(10,21)</sup>. This is reflected by a variety of effects on motility: increase of evoked contractions and spasmogenic effects, induction of spontaneous contractions and increase of tone, especially at higher concentrations (300 nmol/L). Therefore it might be possible that more receptors could be involved. Also in other species SP is known to activate different neurokinin receptors<sup>(6)</sup>.

Therefore to determine the receptors involved in rat myenteric plexus, we used in this study specific receptor antagonists which had been developed and used during the last years<sup>(11,21,22,27,28)</sup>. The excitatory effect of SP on reflex pathway in whole segments of rat intestine was confirmed by an inhibitory effect of two specific NK<sub>1</sub>-receptor antagonists (GR-82334 and CP-96.345), indicating that SP acts via NK<sub>1</sub>-receptors on the myenteric reflex pathway in rat intestine. Our results are consistent with the results of other reports in intestine, where SP was found to accelerate the transit of meal through the small intestine *in vivo*<sup>(6)</sup>, which pointed at a possible altered reflex pathway. To examine the length of neurons involved we measured the reflex response at different distances. The inhibition of the oral contraction occurred at a distance of 4 cm from the stimulation site but was unaltered at 2 cm distance. Because of these results we postulate that SP acts on NK<sub>1</sub>-receptors, most likely on longer ascending neurons in rat small intestine mediating the reflex response. Latency has been used as a parameter to measure effects on interneurons. This was shown previously in whole segments of rat intestine using different opioid agonists and antagonists which alter

latency<sup>(29)</sup>. To investigate the kind of neurons involved we examined the effect of different tachykinin receptor antagonists on latency. NK<sub>1</sub>-receptor antagonists could not change latency between onset of stimulation and the beginning of the reflex response, so that we speculate that interneurons are not involved. SP acts via NK<sub>1</sub>-receptors on longer ascending motor neurons on the reflex pathway in rat intestine. Another mechanism is via release of histamine. It was shown that intestinal mast cells could be stimulated by SP to release histamine in rat intestine<sup>(30)</sup>. A close relationship between mast cells and nerve terminals containing SP is known<sup>(31,32)</sup> and the inhibitory effects of histamine H<sub>1</sub>- and H<sub>2</sub>-receptor blockers on the ascending reflex pathway have been demonstrated<sup>(26)</sup>. But this postulated mechanism of SP on histamine release is unlikely under our experimental conditions in rat intestine as the excitatory effect of SP could not be reduced by pre-treatment with pyrilamine (100 nmol/L) and clobenpropit (10 nmol/L) together (data not shown). NK<sub>2</sub>-receptors do not take part in the ascending reflex pathway in rat intestine under our experimental conditions, as administration of both a specific NK<sub>2A</sub>- (MEN-10.376)<sup>(21,27)</sup> and a NK<sub>2B</sub>- (L-659.877)<sup>(11,21,28)</sup> receptor antagonist, did not change the electrical stimulated myenteric reflex pathway. Latency was unaffected after administration of both NK<sub>2</sub>-receptor antagonists MEN-10.376 and L-659.877. A study<sup>(23)</sup> using the unspecific charcoal method showed an increase of transit via NK<sub>2</sub>-receptors by application of [ $\beta$ -Ala<sup>8</sup>]-NKA, an NK<sub>2</sub>-receptor agonist. In these experiments it was not possible to determine the exact reason for the change of transit time. According to our data this could be an unspecific effect via ascending reflex pathway on NK<sub>1</sub>-receptors or it might be due to a direct effect on the muscle layer. An effect via NK<sub>2</sub>-receptors on the reflex pathway whereas seems to be unlikely. In experiments using isolated muscle strips of rat small intestine, an increase of contractions of the longitudinal muscle<sup>(17)</sup> as well as the circular muscle<sup>(14)</sup> was shown. The contractile response was postulated to be coupled with a Ca<sup>2+</sup> signaling pathway<sup>(21)</sup>.

While examinations were focused on the excitatory effects of tachykinins, no data exist about the effect on the descending inhibitory reflex pathway in rats. In this study SP is shown to increase clearly the descending relaxant reflex response. This result together with the demonstrated increase of contraction is in accordance with the concept of an possible accelerated propulsion caused

by tachykinins.

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**关键词** 速激肽类; 神经激肽-1 受体; 神经激肽-2 受体; P 物质

速激肽对大鼠小肠上行及下行反射通路的作用<sup>1</sup>

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